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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

USS ESSEX (LHD 2)
FLEET POST OFFICE
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

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From: Commanding Officer, USS ESSEX (LHD 2)
To: Director of Naval History (OP-09BH)

Subj: COMMAND HISTORY

Ref: (a) OPNAVINST 5750.12F

Encl: (1) Command Composition and Organization
(2) Chronology
(3) Narrative
(4) Supporting Documents

1. In accordance with requirements set forth in reference (a), enclosures (1) through (4) are submitted for the period 10 July to 31 December 1992.

R. V. BERG
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COMMAND COMPOSITION AND ORGANIZATION

Mission: USS ESSEX (LHD 2) is the second ship of the WASP (LHD 1) Class Multi-purpose Amphibious Assault ships. The mission is to conduct prompt, sustained operations at sea, primarily as the flag ship of an amphibious task group. USS ESSEX has the means to transport, deploy, command, and support all elements of a Marine landing force in an assault by air and amphibious craft.

USS ESSEX is specifically designed to operate Air Cushion Landing Craft (LCAC) for a waterborne assault, and to carry Harrier II (AV-8B) jump jets, for close air support of the assault force. USS ESSEX can accommodate the full range of Navy and Marine Corps helicopters, conventional landing craft and amphibious vehicles, along with all of the tanks, trucks, armored vehicles, artillery, ammunition, and supplies necessary to fully support an amphibious assault.

USS ESSEX is 844 feet long, with a beam of 106 feet. Two steam propulsion plants, capable of developing a combined 70,000 shaft horsepower, to give the 40,500 ton ship the ability to sustain speeds in excess of 20 knots. USS ESSEX has more than 22,000 square feet of vehicle storage space, and 100,000 cubic feet of cargo space. Living areas accommodate the 1099 crewmembers, and 1961 embarked troops and air crews. For combat support, as well as humanitarian missions, ESSEX has six fully equipped operating rooms, four dental operating rooms and hospital facilities capable of caring for 600 patients. When ESSEX is in her homeport of San Diego, Ca. she could readily become the largest hospital in San Diego county.

Organizational Structure:	COMPHIBRON NINE COMNAVSEASYS COM Washington DC
Commanding Officer:	Ronald V. Berg Captain, USN
Permanent Homeport:	Naval Station 32nd St San Diego, Ca

Encl (1)

CHRONOLOGY

July

- 10 Ship ESSEX delivered to the U.S. Navy
- 13 Commenced Panama Canal transit preparations.

August

- 12 Commenced Crew Certification Phase I.
Embarked Commander Amphibious Squadron NINE.
- 14 Completed Crew Cert Phase I, COMPHIBRON NINE departed.
- 23 Commenced preparations for emergency sortie to avoid
Hurricane Andrew.
- 24 Underway from Pascagoula, MS. commissioned without ceremony.
- 28 Return to Ingalls Shipyard, Pascagoula, MS.
- 31 Embarked Commander Amphibious Squadron NINE.

September

- 01 Commenced CINCPACFLT propulsion examination board Light Off Examination.
- 03 Satisfactorily completed Light Off Examination.
- 04 Completed Panama Canal transit preparations.
- 06 Crewmember, Airman M. S. Jarrad, SSN 256-57-7901, died as a result of an off duty parachuting accident.
- 08 Departed Pascagoula, MS enroute to San Diego, Ca.
- 09 Conducted first flight operations.
- 10 Conducted first Landing Craft Air Cushion operations, embarked 3 LCACs for delivery to Assault Craft Unit FIVE.
- 12 Conducted first close in weapon system gun shoot.
- 14 Arrived Cristobal Harbor, Panama.
- 15 Transited Panama Canal, Moored Pier 7, Balboa, Panama.
- 16 Departed Balboa, Panama
- 17 Commenced crossing the equator events.
- 18 Crossed equator, conducted Shellback initiation.
- 19 Conducted CIWS and .50 Cal gun shoot. Conducted Medevac of USS PRINCETON (CG 59) crewmember to ESSEX.
- 26 Debarked 3 LCAC's vicinity of Camp Pendleton, embarked 1 LCAC. Arrived in San Diego.
- 28 Commenced Panama Canal transit restoration.

October

- 09 Completed Panama Canal transit restoration.
- 12 Commenced preparations to get underway.
- 13 Underway from Naval Station 32nd St.
Moored Carrier Pier, Naval Air Station, North Island.
Commenced preparations for the commissioning ceremony
- 16 Set flight quarters/recovered UH1N Side #159208
AH1W Side #162575
CH53 Side #157175
CH46 Side #157703
- 17 USS ESSEX (LHD 2) commissioned. Sec of Defense Richard Chaney presiding. Administrative chain of command change.
- 18 Conducted visit ship.
Set flight quarters/launched UH1N, AH1W, CH53, and CH46.
Commenced preparations for getting underway.
- 19 Underway from carrier Pier NAS NI.
Conducted dependents cruise, launched LCAC
Moored Pier 2 NAVSTA 32nd St.
- 20 Commenced Fitting Out Availability.

November

- 02 First Plankowner transfers, general ship visit.
- 05 Ship visit by Naval War College Foreign Officer Students.
- 09 Broke COMPHIBGRU THREE's flag.
- 10 Held USMC birthday ceremony.
- 24 Hosted retirement ceremony for Capt Santa Maria, Chief of Staff COMPHIBGRU THREE.

December

- 06 COMPHIBGRU THREE flag hauled down.
- 17 Montel Williams television show taped onboard.
- 18 Completed Fitting Out Availability (FOA).
- 21 Departed NAVSTA 32nd St for sea.
- 22 Returned to NAVSTA 32nd St.

January

- 04 Underway from Naval Station San Diego for Southern California operating area.
- 08 Returned to NAVSTA San Diego.
- 09 Ship's force attends Gator Ball.
- 11 Underway from NAVSTA San Diego for Southern California Operating area.
- 12 Conducted first AV-8B flight Ops.
- 19 Returned to NAVSTA San Diego.
- 21 Crewmember died in an auto accident.

Narrative

July

- 10th Captain R.V. Berg, PCO ESSEX (LHD-2) and Captain B. Woodruff, Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Pascagoula, MS., Signed the delivery document transferring ESSEX (LHD 2) from Ingalls Shipbuilding to the U.S. Navy. ESSEX was "in service special" in compliance with Chief of Naval Operations message 090045Z July 92. ESSEX is moored portside to the Ingalls Pier, Berth 2, Ingalls Shipyard, Pascagoula, MS. The first Quarterdeck Watch is set, PCO ESSEX reports aboard, and the crew assigned to the shore based unit reports aboard.
- 13th Ingalls shipyard personnel commenced Panama Canal transit preparations. The preparations involve removing catwalks, boat davit, life boats and communication antennas in order for ESSEX to fit through the canal locks.

August

- 12th Commander Amphibious Squadron NINE and staff arrived onboard to conduct Crew Certification Phase I. At 1200 the Commodores flag was broken and ESSEX became COMPHIBRON NINE Flag Ship.
- 14th Crew Certification Phase I successfully completed, the crew of ESSEX praised for its hard work in preparing for and conducting certification. Commander Amphibious Squadron NINE and staff departed, his flag is hauled down.
- 23rd Commenced emergency sortie preparations to avoid Hurricane Andrew. Weather predictions indicated the possibility of Hurricane Andrew making land fall along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.
- 24th Departed Pascagoula, MS. to avoid Hurricane Andrew. Commissioned without ceremony IAW COMNAVSEASYSCOM message 241149Z Aug 92 and Supship Pascagoula Message 242001Z Aug 92. Transited to a position in the south central Gulf of Mexico. Hurricane Andrew tracked 230 NM north of USS ESSEX.
- 28th Returned to Pascagoula, MS. During the storm evasion ESSEX remained clear of the storm center, weather and seas.

31th Embarked Commander Amphibious Squadron NINE and broke his flag.

September

1st Commenced Engineering Light Off Examination conducted by CINCPACFLT Propulsion Examination Board.

3rd Engineering Light Off Examination successfully completed, PEB departed. COMPHIBRON NINE departed for San Diego, his flag hauled down.

4th All Panama Canal transit preparations complete. All catwalks, life boats, etc. Secured to the flight deck.

6th Airman Michael Shea Jarrad, 256-57-7901 died at 1530 as a result of a parachuting accident. Airman Jarrad was in a liberty status and the accident was not duty related.

8th Underway from Pascagoula, MS. to San Diego, Ca. In accordance with COMNAVSURFPAC quarterly schedule 202343Z July 92. The day was spent in the Northern Gulf of Mexico conducting acceptance trial evolutions not completed during acceptance trials. Received COMPHIBRON NINE msg 082150Z Sep 92 which eliminated Crew Certification Phase II due to hurricane evasion operations 24-28 August.

9th Conducted ship's first flight operations, which included numerous launches, recoveries and refuelings. The aircraft involved were UH1N Huey #409 and #404 and Cobra's #46 and #59 from Marine Airgroup Four Two, Marine Air Group Four Two detachment Charlie and Helo Support Squadron Sixteen. All evolutions performed safely in an area 30 NM south of Pensacola, Fl.

10th Conducted first Landing Craft Air Cushion Operations off Panama City, FL. Embarking LCAC Craft #47, #48 and #52 for transport to Camp Pendleton, CA. Commenced transit south to the Panama Canal. During the transit assisted Commander Joint Task Force FOUR by providing air tracking services and merchant vessel identification in support of law enforcement drug operations.

12th Conducted first self defense weapon gun shoot. All three close in weapon system mounts operated satisfactorily.

14th Arrived at and anchored in Cristobal Harbor, Panama, the Atlantic entrance to the Panama Canal.

15th Commenced transit of the Panama Canal. Crossed the Continental Divide at 1215R. The transit time was 12 hours and 18 minutes and ended when ESSEX moored to Pier 7, Balboa Panama.

16th Departed Balboa, Panama, enroute to San Diego, Ca., via the Equator.

17th Commenced crossing the line events. Activities included a beauty contest, with departmental entries, Equator and Iceberg Lookout, Radar Watch, Watch Dog, and Shoe Shine watches.

18th Crossed the Equator at 0049R at position 00° 00'N, 081° 21.0'W. Conducted Shellback initiation transforming 792 Polliwogs (782 crewmembers and 10 civilian riders), into Trusty Shellbacks.

19th Conducted close in weapon system and 50 cal machine gun shoot. Conducted medical evacuation from USS PRINCETON (CG 59) to ESSEX. A PRINCETON crewmember was experiencing chest pains and shortness of breath. The patient was treated and kept onboard until ESSEX arrived in San Diego.

24th During the transit north off the coast of Mexico, ESSEX served as a target of opportunity for the USS KITTY HAWK (CV 63) Battlegroup during her fleet exercise.

26th Debarked LCAC #47, #48 and #52 at Assault Craft Unit Five, Camp Pendleton, Ca. Embarked LCAC #45 which was retained onboard. LCAC #45 to be on display during visit ship following the Commissioning Ceremony 17 Oct 92. Arrived 1400 at pier two Naval Station 32nd St, San Diego, Ca., USS ESSEX's homeport. The USS PRINCETON patient was returned to USS PRINCETON.

28th Commenced Panama Canal transit restoration. Southwest Marine Shipyard contracted to perform the work. The catwalks, life boats, boat davit, and communication antennas were reinstalled.

October

9th Completed Panama Canal transit restoration.

12th Commenced preparations for getting underway in order to move from NAVSTA 32nd St To NAS North Island.

13th Underway from NAVSTA 32nd St at 0711. Moored starboard side to the Carrier Pier, Berth P, Naval Air Station, North Island, Ca., at 0818. Commenced commissioning ceremony preparations, including manning the ship training, ship visits and Commanding Officer interviews by San Diego newspaper and television reporters, and ship decorating.

16th Set Flight Quarters to land aircraft. The following aircraft were landed; a UH1N side #159208, and AH1W side #162575, and CH53 side #157175, and a CH46 side #157703. These aircraft were positioned on the flight deck as static displays to be viewed by guests of the crew and the general public following the commissioning ceremony.

17th At 1000 commenced USS ESSEX Commissioning Ceremony. The platform guests included:

The Honorable Richard Cheney, Secretary of Defense
Mrs. Lynne Cheney, Ships Sponsor
The Honorable Sean O'Keefe, Acting Secretary of the Navy
The Honorable Duncan Hunter, Congressmen CA-45th District
The Honorable William Lowery, Congressmen CA-41th District
Vice Admiral Rudy Kohn, COMNAVAIRPAC
Vice Admiral David Bennett, COMNAVSURFPAC
Lieutenant General H. C. Stackpole III, USMC, FMFPAC
Rear Admiral Tim Hood, COMNAVSEASYSOM (06)
Rear Admiral Jim Perkins, COMPHIBGRU THREE
Rear Admiral F. Holian, COMNAVBASE San Diego
Mr. E. Shoults, COMNAVSEASYSOM PMS 377 (LHD Program Manager)
Captain T. Hopson, COMPHIBRON NINE
Captain B. Woodruff, Supervisor of Shipbuilding, Pascagoula
Mr. J. St Pe', President of Ingalls Shipbuilding
Mr. M. Wax, Chairman ESSEX Commissioning Committee

At 1030 ESSEX was officially commissioned, the commissioning pennant, and National Ensign were broken. At 1050 the Secretary of Defense flag was broken. At 1110 the commissioning ceremony was completed, Secretary of Defense departed and his flag was hauled down. Following the ceremony receptions were held at the Officers Club, NAS North Island, and onboard USS ESSEX (LHD 2). The new administrative chain of command changed the ship's ISIC from COMNAVSURFPAC to COMPHIBRON NINE per CNSP msg 191923Z Oct 92.

- 18th From 1200 to 1600 ESSEX hosted a ship visit for the general public as part of the commissioning weekend. A total of 7,333 guests toured the ship. Upon completion of visit ship; flight quarters set to launch the four helicopters landed on the 16th and commenced preparations to get the ship underway.
- 19th 0916 underway from the Carrier pier NAS North Island for sea. On board were 1600 family members and guests. At 1103 set Condition 1A for LCAC operations. Launched LCAC #45, recovered and launched LCAC #16, completing operations at 1232. The LCAC's off loaded all USMC equipment which had been brought on board for display during the commissioning ceremony. The USMC equipment included: two M923/813 five ton trucks with Howitzers, an armored HMMWV, an Amphibious Assault Vehicle, a Mev (SOC) Fast Attack Vehicle and an ambulance. Between 1232 and 1411 conducted flight operations with clememtime 761, an H3 helicopter. At 1556 moored Pier 2 NAVSTA 32nd St.
- 20th Commenced Fitting Out Availability. The major contractor of the availability is Continental Maritime of San Diego. Numerous areas throughout the ship were modified such as: Combat Information Center, all Damage Control Repair Lockers, the Pilothouse and enclosed Bridge Wing, and Combat Systems Spaces for installation of CSSOS.

November

- 2nd BM1 Archie B. Greer, USN, 183-64-6688, transferred off USS ESSEX, he was the first Plankowner to depart. Hosted a visit by the American Osteopathic Association. The visit was held over a three day period (2,3,4 Nov) and a total of 410 association members and families participated.
- 5th The Commanding Officer hosted a visit by foreign officer students of the U.S. Naval War College. Twenty two students from Europe, Asia, Africa, Central and South America along with four NWC Staff Officers participated.
- 9th At 0900 broke COMPHIBGRU THREE's flag. While USS ESSEX served as Amphibious Group THREE Flag Ship, RADM Perkins and his staff did not physically embark onboard.

10th At 0745 held USMC birthday ceremony on the flight deck. With the crew at quarters, Major P. Bann, ESSEX Senior Marine, addressed ships company and Captain Berg congratulated the six Marine crew members and all Marines for 217 years of proud and faithful service to the United States.

24th The Commanding Officer hosted a retirement ceremony for Capt. D. F. Santa Maria, USN. Capt. Santa Maria's final assignment in the Navy was Chief of Staff, Amphibious Group THREE. Official guests included:

COMNAVSURFPAC
 COMPHIBGRU THREE
 CO 1st Force Service Support Group
 CO USS DULUTH
 CO USS DURHAM
 CO USS OKINAWA
 CO USS CORONADO
 CO AMPHIB School Coronado
 COMPHIBRON NINE
 COMPHIBRON FIVE
 COMTACGRU ONE
 COMNAVBEACHGRU ONE
 COMTACRON ELEVEN
 COMTACRON TWELVE
 CO ACB ONE
 CO ACU ONE

December

6th COMPHIBGRU THREE shifted his flag from USS ESSEX to USS LONG BEACH (CGN 9).

17th Montel Williams, a television talk show host, taped a program onboard. The theme of the show concerned dependents of those personnel deployed to Somalia in support of operation "RESTORE HOPE". USN and USMC dependents from San Diego and Long Beach were invited.

18th Fitting Out Availability was completed. A fast cruise was conducted for crew training in preparation for Sea Trials.

21st Underway from NAVSTA 32nd St. To Southern California operation areas for FOA Sea trials. Ships equipment testing was conducted along with general crew training.

22nd FOA Sea Trials complete, moored to Pier 2, NAVSTA 32nd St.

January

4th Underway from Naval Station San Diego for the Southern California operating area. Ship's evolutions during this period included equipment testing and crew training.

8th Returned to NAVSTA San Diego, moored to Pier 2 at Berth 25N.

9th 90 ESSEX Officers and their guests attended the annual Gator Ball at the US Grant Hotel.

11th Underway from NAVSTA San Diego for the SOCAL opera ship's evolutions during this period were crew training.

12th Conducted the first AV-8B Harrier jet aircraft Ops (USMC).

19th Returned to NAVSTA San Diego, moored to Pier 2 at Berth 25N.

21st MM2 Steven David Arnold, USN, SS# 049-60-0262 died in an automobile accident. The accident occurred on California State Highway #94 in the City of San Diego, Ca. MM2 Arnold had been traveling westbound on Highway #94 at a high rate of speed when he lost control of the vehicle he was driving. The vehicle left the roadway and struck a tree. MM2 Arnold was transported to UCSD Hospital where he was pronounced dead. A shipmate was a passenger, he sustained injuries but survived. MM2 Arnold was operating his personal vehicle and was in a liberty status at the time of the accident.

26th Memorial service for MM2 Arnold conducted on the Flight Deck.